

Friendly PEERsuasion

Brief Program Description

Friendly PEERsuasion is a leadership and substance abuse prevention program, based on the social influence and life skills models of prevention, designed to help girls ages 11 through 14 acquire knowledge, skills, and support systems to avoid substance abuse. Underlying Friendly PEERsuasion is the theory that girls who are prepared to teach other children not to use substances would be less at risk of using these substances themselves. Through a process of “anticipatory socialization” (seeing themselves as future leaders), the girls trained to become PEERsuaders would be more likely to identify with the values and norms expressed by the staff than girls who had not undergone the training. The fundamental purpose is to build girls’ capacity to become adults who are responsible, confident, economically independent, and personally fulfilled.

In the first phase, middle school girls participate in 14 biweekly, hour-long sessions facilitated by a trained adult leader. Through hands-on, interactive activities such as games and group discussions, they learn about the short- and long-term effects of substance abuse, experience healthy ways to manage stress, practice skills for making responsible decisions about licit and illicit drug use, and prepare to become peer leaders. After completing this phase, girls are certified as “PEERsuaders.” In the second phase of the program, small teams of PEERsuaders plan and implement 8 to 10 half-hour sessions of substance abuse prevention activities for children ages 6 through 10. Working with their adult leaders, PEERsuaders draw on the skills and activities introduced in the first phase of the program and their own experiences and creativity to present factual information and to model and practice skills, attitudes, and behaviors related to substance abuse prevention.

The program significantly reduced the incidence of drinking among participants and the onset of drinking among participants who had not previously drunk alcohol. The treatment group participants significantly increased leadership skills, stress-reducing skills, and communication skills. Treatment group participants also showed a significantly lower incidence of favorable attitudes toward drinking, and were more likely to leave gatherings where people were drinking alcohol. The program led participants to disengage from peers who smoked or took drugs.

Contact Information

For indepth information on this program, please use the contact listed below.

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